

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is taken from Saint Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, chapter six, verses ten and fourteen. "FINALLY, BE STRONG IN THE LORD and in the strength of his might ... Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness"

Boys and Girls, I pray that you are doing well today. Are you prepared for anything to happen? Floods, fires, medical emergencies, anything? No? Being prepared is always on the minds of the warriors serving so faithfully in our armed forces. There is not a day that goes by that they are not ready or training to be more ready. They must be ready at a moment's notice to answer the call. Once the alarm sounds, they don't have time to get ready ... they need to be ready. And to be ready they train, train, and train some more. They train as they would fight. The Navy SEAL motto is "the only easy day was yesterday." It is all about preparation and being ready to win our nation's battles. We plan as families for what can happen in our lives or at school, fire drills, tornado drills, lockdown drills. Even as Christians we prepare. Preparation is critical in any planning, but especially in planning a defense. How do we defend ourselves? How does Christ defend us? Ponder those questions as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seat and those who love you.

1. Be Ready!

It is important to be reminded that we truly are living in the Church Militant. We are present in a world where we are in a war with the devil, the world and our sinful nature. So, I ask the question: "Are you ready?"

Are you ready for the battles and sufferings that you will face every day? Are you ready for the temptations that the devil will hurl your way to interrupt and perhaps destroy your life? What is your plan to sustain you on the battlefield of life? How will you endure? What is your hope and confidence as you go into battle and suffering every day?

We can't kid ourselves. We live in a sin-sick world, surrounded by evil. In America we may not yet be hauled out of our churches, our homes or our businesses by evil men, who put us on our knees with a gun or sword to our head and say, "Renounce Jesus or die!"

We know that in other parts of the world, this is happening even today. Christians are being executed and martyred daily for their faith. Here in our country, people are losing their jobs or positions for giving a defense of the faith and speaking out against issues that go contrary to the Word of God. We are being told to keep our religion in the church and out of the public square. Oh yes, they tell you, you have freedom to worship in your church, but don't bring it out into the public. Hang your personal faith at the door on the way out of your house or church.

How often have we given in and stood by quietly in a discussion in the public square about cultural issues instead of speaking out? Did we remain silent because we didn't want to be labeled a "bigot," or judgmental, or narrow-minded, or a proponent of "hate speech"? We don't want to suffer for what we believe. We want to be liked and accepted. It is not easy to stand strong in the Lord.

Or you may be saying, "I am in the middle of a war right now with an illness, disease, broken relationship, guilt, depression, addiction. I know what war looks like spiritually as well as physically. I have tried everything I can to fight, to win ... yet the pain continues, and I am stricken, smitten and afflicted."

That is where Paul in our text points us to where we find our fortress, our help, our comfort, our armor. It is not within us. We can't stand and fight alone. The Holy Spirit calls us, gathers us, enlightens us, keeps us in the faith. We don't stand a chance without the Holy Spirit.

2. Enemy we face

On our own, the devil will find a chink in our armor and again bring us to despair and hopelessness. We can give our troops the best equipment possible to protect them, yet we see people killed in combat despite the heavy armor they are wearing. Many are killed by shrapnel or bullets despite all their

training, all their combat gear, all their armor. The enemy found chinks in the armor.

My friends, the devil will do the same to us. He knows the chink in your armor and your weaknesses. He will attack and attack where you are most vulnerable.

The goal of our enemy the devil is to get you to hell with him. He wants you to doubt the Word of God, to say there is not truth, no absolutes. He wants you to doubt the promises of God. He wants you to lose hope in Jesus and fall into hopelessness and despair. The goal through all his lies and chaos is to get us to be separated from our Lord Jesus forever, to doubt the truth of His Word. He repeats what he did when he tempted Adam and Eve. “Did God really say?”

3. Armor of God

We turn to our text for today and find that God by the power of the Holy Spirit has prepared armor for us to fight in this Church Militant. Why? So that when the devil tries to tell you that you aren't good enough to be a child of God, or you are too evil for God to love and die for, that Jesus couldn't have paid for your sins, your guilt, your evilness, you may be able to stand strong in the Lord and in His might.

The first piece is the belt of truth. Fasten on the belt of truth. What is truth? Today, there seems to be no absolute truth. You have your truth, I have my truth, they have their truth. Everything is fluid. No absolutes. Yet we as Christians know that there is truth, and God reminds us in our text that the truth is the belt that holds all God's armor together.

The belt of truth keeps it centered. The truth is that God, who cannot lie, has promised you eternal life. When we live in a world where there seems to be no truth, we hold up our armor with the truth of God. God, who cannot lie, has promised that He sent Jesus to live, to suffer, to die and to rise again, for you! God, who cannot lie, promised that whoever is baptized and believes will be saved. We know the truth. Jesus is truth, life and salvation.

It is true that we who were dead in our sins have been made alive. God makes the great exchange and gives us the breastplate of His righteousness in exchange for our sinfulness. In our Baptism, God reached down into the muck and mire of our sinfulness and made us His children. He sealed us with the Holy Spirit, who created faith in our heart. He freely gives us His righteousness. He gives us forgiveness, life and salvation! No matter what false accusations the devil throws our way about how bad we are, no matter how good we may think we are, our righteousness is still as filthy rags. Yet our Lord gives us the breastplate of His righteousness. Jesus lived a perfect life for us. Jesus kept the law perfectly for you and now gives that righteousness to you. The devil's darts of accusation can't penetrate the Lord's breastplate of righteousness which you wear proudly.

The Holy Spirit created faith in our hearts which clings to the truth of His promises. The shield of faith clings to His Word of forgiveness, hope and healing. Faith clings to the cross of Jesus Christ. This faith shield puts out the flaming arrows the devil shoots at us.

We have the helmet of salvation. By the grace of God, for Christ's sake, through faith, we are saved! We know the truth that this salvation is given to us freely by the grace of God.

Our Lord has also given us the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. That Word of God is a two-edged sword that beats back the devil and his lies. God's Word is truth. Jesus used the Word of God as a sword to defeat Satan when He was tempted in the wilderness. God continues to give us the Word of God to pierce the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. As Luther so boldly proclaims, "One little word can fell him." There will be those who continue to doubt the Word of God, but not us. We know the truth!

We know that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. We truly believe, as we pray in the Collect for the Word, that we will "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest His Holy Word." May it be so for you in your personal devotional life, and in your family devotions. Read! Mark! Learn! And take it to heart!

Finally, we get to another piece of armor that many forget about or take for granted. The footwear. As any foot soldier or grunt Marine can tell you, it does matter what you have on your feet. Without the proper protection, it is easy to slow down and lose your ground and not stand firm.

The Lord is reminding us that because of all that we have just heard and believe, we are now ready to move out. We are ready to move out with the Gospel of peace.

This peace of God passes all understanding. It is the peace that gives us the strength to continue in this vale of tears, in this Church Militant, the present warfare, because we know the end of the line. We know the truth that we are forgiven children of God and that God who loves us will never leave us nor forsake us. It is the peace that comes from knowing that all things work out for the good and according to His purpose. The peace that even though we will continue to feel sadness, struggle with our pet sins, feel pain in relationships and in illness and disease, and experience loneliness in the loss of loved ones, yet we will stand strong in the Lord and in His might. We can trust that even as we live in a sin-sick world, heaven is our home. Our Jesus has defeated our enemy and has given us the armor we need to endure until either our end comes, or Jesus returns on the Last Day.

So, are you ready for war and suffering? Are you ready to face the temptations that await on this battlefield of life? Are you ready to face the pain that may come your way? Are you ready to stand strong in the Lord and in His might? Yes! Yes! Yes, you are ready because God has made you ready to stand strong in the Lord and in His might. No matter how much pain and suffering you encounter, you have the belt of truth around your waist, the truth that God who cannot lie has promised you eternal life. You are forgiven of all your sins and wear the breastplate of righteousness. That is your hope and defense! Your hope is built on Jesus Christ and His righteousness. In Him fight on undismayed, in Him victorious, until your armor lay down, To praise, ever glorious His cross and His crown.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen